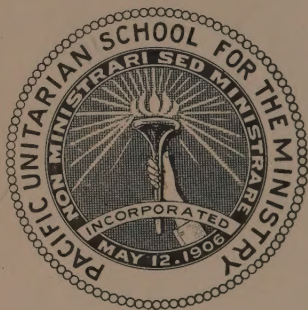


HEROES OF ISRAEL

RICHARD
BARTRAM

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BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

THE GIFT OF

SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

OF LONDON, ENGLAND

School

HEROES OF ISRAEL

BY

RICHARD BARTRAM

AUTHOR OF "STORIES FROM GENESIS" AND "STORIES FROM THE LIFE
OF MOSES"



LONDON

SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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PREFACE.

THIS little book may be regarded somewhat in the light of a continuation of its two predecessors, *Stories from Genesis* and *Stories from the Life of Moses*. The stories and legends which are here told of some of the Old Testament characters are intended to be read by children who have already read the books just named, and who have also been acquiring other knowledge, enabling them to apprehend narratives told in a less simple style, perhaps, than those with which they are already acquainted. It has not been my intention to go into matters of Biblical criticism, though it has not been always easy to avoid doing so. But I have not hesitated, where it seemed to me called for, to apply the same kind of moral criticism to these old-time narratives, that most of us would to similar occurrences in the present day. One knows, alas! too well, that the mere fact of a thing having been done by such men as Joshua, or Samson, or David, is enough in the eyes of

some to justify deeds, which would otherwise be regarded as evil. By all means let us not too hastily condemn these men for acts, which, according to the ideas of their time, were not reprehensible; but we ought not to let our little ones imagine that *we* regard such acts as grateful to God, or that there was any special sanctity in men, simply because their doings are recorded with approbation in the pages of the Old Testament. I believe that the rational treatment of the doings of these "Heroes of Israel" is far better calculated in these days, to preserve a wholesome reverence for the real value of the Bible, than is any attempt to palliate wrong, or to suggest that the moral difficulties which present themselves are due to our own sceptical tendencies. Whatever be the result, of this at least I feel assured, that the reverence due to the little ones placed in our charge, demands from us honest expression of our convictions. So far as I am concerned, I have tried to give this in the following pages.

R. B.

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HEROES OF ISRAEL.



Introduction.

MOST of you who now read this book have, no doubt, read many of the stories which are to be found in the Book of Genesis. As you know, this is the first book in the Bible, and it tells us about the beginning or origin of the world as it was conceived by some old writers ; and in it, too, we read about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his Brethren, and several other beautiful old time stories. Many of you, too, have also read about Moses, and how he led the "children of Israel" out of captivity in Egypt ; how he made some wise and useful laws for them, and how, while they were under his leadership they often murmured against him, and were even disposed to regret that he had brought them out of Egypt. We learn what there is to learn about Moses in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These books, together with the Book of Genesis, are called the *Pentateuch*, or *Five Books of Moses*, some persons having supposed that they were written by Moses himself. It is not at all likely that as we have them now, Moses did write them, though it is quite possible that some portions, but which we cannot say, were written by him.

Having read so much, and, as I hope, liked what you read, you will doubtless desire to know whether there are not to be found in the other books of the Bible some stories quite as interesting and well worth remembering as those you have already read about. Well, yes, there are a great many other stories which you ought to know, but I cannot say that they are all beautiful. Some of them are sad ; some of them show that the men and women in these old times were very cruel, and had very mistaken notions about right and wrong ; and some show that their ideas about God and what He takes pleasure in, were very different from what we have learned to believe. But then we remember that it is because we have *learned* to know better, that we now feel that these men and women were mistaken in their thoughts about God. Had we lived then, there is no reason to believe that we should have acted or even thought differently from them. Indeed while many of us, I hope most of us, have come to think so much more noble and worthy thoughts about God and His ways, there are some who have not yet come to share those thoughts, some who do cruel things, and who believe that God is pleased thereat ; and some who do wrong things and do not seem to care whether or not they are pleasing to God or man. It may be useful, therefore, if we read some of these stories even those which I have said are not beautiful, in order that we may learn to avoid doing the same kind of thing ourselves, should we ever be tempted to do so. And it will be still better if we read and remember those stories that are beautiful, so that we may follow the good examples that are set before us, and may profit by the knowledge that even in those far-off days there were men and women who were good, and noble and unselfish, who loved God, and strove to do what was right

You will come to learn that many of these stories might be told even of people in these times, and that neither good nor evil is confined to one age, or place, or nation. With these words of introduction, let us turn to the stories themselves, and find what they have to tell us.



Joshua.

MOSES, you may recollect, although he is said to have led the Israelites out of Egypt, and to have given them many laws, and to have been oftentimes sorely vexed at their ingratitude and rebellious spirit, during their wanderings in Arabia, did not live long enough to lead them into "the promised land." It is stated in the Book of Numbers that it was because Moses on one occasion neglected to do just what the Lord told him to do, that he was not permitted to be the leader of the Israelites into Canaan, though he was allowed to view portions of it from "the top of Pisgah" just before his death. The man who was to do this had already been selected by Moses : it was Joshua, the son of Nun. There are a few references to Joshua in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy : he was one of the spies sent out by Moses to find out what sort of a place the land of Canaan was, and who, when the Israelites murmured because these spies reported that the people of the land were stronger than they, had rebuked them for their cowardice ; it was Joshua who wanted Moses to forbid Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp, instead of in the tabernacle, and which called forth a noble answer from Moses. But we learn more about Joshua from the book that bears his name, and which is placed in the Bible

immediately after the last of the five books forming the Pentateuch. As is the case with many other of the books of the Bible, we do not know who was the author ; some persons think that parts of it were written by Joshua himself, while others think that it was not written until several centuries after the events it records. This is not, however, a matter about which we need now trouble ourselves very much ; it is perhaps enough for you to know that even our learned men cannot be quite sure about it, one way or the other. Let us see what the book itself has to tell us about Joshua, and the Israelites whom he was to lead. And here let me remind you, what you have already learned, that when we read such expressions as "the Lord spake," or "the Lord said," they generally mean not that God spoke, just as your parents speak to you, but that the persons addressed thought the things expressed by the words spoken. God speaks to us in many ways no doubt, and sometimes, it may be, that He speaks to us through our thoughts, though it would be a great mistake for us to imagine that all our thoughts are the same thing as God's voice. We have to learn, sometimes with difficulty, to try them, and see if they are really messengers of God, bidding us to do what is right and noble and true.

After the death of Moses, the writer of the book of Joshua tells us, "it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Joshua," telling him to arise and go over Jordan, together with all the people, unto the land which he gave to them, the children of Israel. And this land was to be* "from the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun." "There shall not any man," the writer

* Joshua i. 3-7.

makes God say, "be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life : as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee : I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of good courage : for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee : turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed : for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

You must get some one to show you a map of Canaan, and if you look at that you will see that "the wilderness" is at the south, or bottom, while "Lebanon" is at the north, or top of the map. "The great sea" is the Mediterranean, and lies on the west, "towards the going down of the sun." But you will not probably see the great river "Euphrates," because the land up to that river did not form part of the land of Canaan. It was not until many years after the time of Joshua, that the land belonging to the "children of Israel" extended so far to the east, or north-east, as the Euphrates.

Joshua, we are told, in consequence of this message of the Lord, commanded the officers of the people, that is, the chiefs of the tribes, to pass among them and to tell them to prepare victuals for the journey, for in three days they were to pass over Jordan, in order "to go in to

possess the land." In the book of Numbers,* there is a story to the effect that the children of Gad and of Reuben had asked Moses to be allowed to stay on the east side of the river Jordan, where there was plenty of pasture for their cattle. But Moses appeared to think that they were cowards, and were content to let their brethren go to war, while they stopped behind, so he was very angry, telling them they were no better than their fathers, who, on the return of the spies, had "discouraged the heart of the children of Israel." But they were not cowards, and in order to allay the wrath of Moses, we are told, expressed their willingness to take their share of the fighting, and to "go ready armed before the children of Israel" until they should have brought them to their place. Moses said unto them—

If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the Lord to war, and will go all of you armed over Jordan before the Lord, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, and the land be subdued before the Lord : then afterwards ye shall return, and be guiltless before the Lord, and before Israel ; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord : and be sure your sin will find you out. Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep ; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth.

And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, *Thy servants*

will do as my lord commandeth. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead: but thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle as my lord saith.

When, therefore, the advance was about to begin, Joshua, who was aware of the promise they had made, reminded the Reubenites and Gadites of it. And they answered him* that whatever he commanded they would do, and that where he sent them they would go. "According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee; only the Lord thy God be with thee, as He was with Moses. Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandments, and will not hearken unto thy words, in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage." It was thus that these tribes made their vow of allegiance to the new leader.

Before, however, the children of Israel, or the tribes just mentioned, started for the land of promise, Joshua sent out two men to spy secretly, and view the land, even to Jericho. The land of Canaan was not peopled with men or tribes likely to be friendly to the invaders, for such they were, and it behoved Joshua, as a prudent leader, to know something of the land and its inhabitants, before he led his people on what might prove a perilous journey. So he sent out these two men, and they went to Jericho and lodged at the house of a woman named Rahab. Now the king of Jericho had been told that these men had come, and he sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered

* Joshua i. 16-18.

into thine house ; for they be come to search out all the country." The rest of the story you shall read as it is told in the second chapter of the book of Joshua—

And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, *There came men unto me, but I wist [knew] not whence they were: and it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark that the men went out; whither the men went, I wot not; pursue after them quickly, for ye shall overtake them.*

But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order upon the roof. And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords; and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

And before they were laid down she came up unto them upon the roof, and she said unto the men, *I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these*

things our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you ; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now, therefore I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token ; and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

Then she let them down by a cord through the window : for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you ; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned, and afterwards may ye go your way.

And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by : and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy

brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless; and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

And she said, *According unto your words, so be it.* And she sent them away, and they departed, and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

And they went and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned; and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not. So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua, and told him all things that befell them; and they said unto Joshua, *Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.*

The spies were somewhat hasty in accepting entirely all that Rahab had told them about the people, because, as you will see, they were not so terrified or faint-hearted as to give up their land without a struggle. However, it would seem that the report encouraged

Joshua, who advanced with the Israelites to the banks of the Jordan, where they stopped for three days, at the end of which time they commenced their passage across. The writer of this story tells us that the passage was effected in a wonderful manner. In front of the host went the priests bearing what was called "the ark of the covenant," a kind of chest in which were contained the laws said to have been given by the Lord to Moses. As the feet of the priests who bore the ark touched the water, it rose up upon a heap, and the priests stood with the ark in the midst of Jordan until the Israelites passed over on dry ground, clean over Jordan. Then Joshua commanded that a man from each of the twelve tribes should take a stone upon his shoulder and carry them unto the place where they lodged, and lay them down there, and another twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, and these stones were to "be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever."

Thus it was that the writer, whoever he was, accounted for the two piles of stones, which, he tells us, "are there unto this day," that is, the time when he wrote the book. He connects them, you see, with an old legend about the crossing over of the Israelites into the land of Canaan. The place where they are said to have crossed over is called Gilgal, and if you will look on the map you will see that it is not very far from Jericho, about the taking of which we will read in the next chapter. The name Gilgal means "rolling," and the writer of the story we are reading tells us that it was so called because the Lord had there "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" from the children of Israel, that is, had so far forgiven them for their rebellious and cowardly conduct in the wilderness, that he allowed them to enter the promised land.

The Victories of Joshua.

YOU probably remember that when the Israelites were in the desert, they are said to have been fed in a miraculous way. Manna was given to them to eat every morning. But when they got to Gilgal they began to "eat of the old corn of the land," and the manna ceased. It must have been a great treat to them to be able to "eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan," but a long time was to elapse, and much hard work had to be done before the invaders were to become the possessors of the land. At the outset there was the large city of Jericho in their way, and the inhabitants thereof had prepared themselves for a siege; as it says, "Jericho was straitly [strictly] shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none went in." And now you shall read for yourselves the account as it is given us in the book of Joshua, of how the city was taken. Only first let me remind you that the writer was an Israelite, and that he wrote as an Israelite proud of his nation, with which, as it had been successful, he would naturally think that God was specially pleased, besides being kindly disposed towards Joshua. It is probably due to this feeling that just before the siege of Jericho he tells a story of a vision that appeared to Joshua in the shape of a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who, in answer to Joshua's question "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" replied that he came as the captain of the host of the Lord, and when Joshua fell on his face and worshipped, asking what commands his Lord had for him, simply said, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." The writer thus recorded an old tradition

showing clearly that God was on the side of Joshua. And now let us read the account of the capture of Jericho.*

And the Lord said unto Joshua, *See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war; and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.*

And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, *Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns, before the ark of the Lord.*

And he said unto the people, *Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the Lord.*

And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before

* Joshua vi. 2-16.

the Lord, and blew with the trumpets : and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them.

And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, *Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout ; then shall ye shout.* So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once : and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets : and the armed men went before them ; but the rereward came after the ark of the Lord, the priests going on and blowing with the trumpets. And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp : so they did six days.

And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times : only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with

the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, *Shout ; for the Lord hath given you the city.*

Then Joshua warned them that the city was to be devoted, that is, sacrificed, to the Lord, and that only Rahab, and all that were with her in the house, should live, because she had hidden the two spies. None of the Israelites were to take any of the spoils of the city, lest they should cause trouble in the camp ; but the gold and silver and vessels of brass and iron were to be consecrated to the Lord, and to come into his treasury. The story goes on*—

So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets ; and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein ; only the silver and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

And Joshua saved Rahab alive, and her father's household, and all that she had, because she hid the messengers which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

* Verses 20-27.

So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.

This is indeed a terrible story, and we can well understand how, when the news spread, the inhabitants began to dread the approach of these fierce Israelites, who seemed to think they were doing the will of the God they worshipped, by killing all who opposed them. It is, perhaps, not quite right to judge these men as we should judge those who did such things in these times, because men had not come to learn the wickedness and cruelty of such acts. We must remember, too, that notwithstanding this evil, good came out of it after a time. There have been things done in the history of our own country which we cannot regard with approval now, and yet these very things have, through the providence of God, led to better, so much better that you and I are all the happier and nobler for it.

I told you just now that Joshua warned the Israelites not to take any of the spoils of the captured city, save what was intended for the Lord. But one of them named Achan, of the tribe of Judah, took "a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver,* and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight," and hid them in the earth over which his tent stood. For this we are told that the Lord was displeased with the children of Israel, and that he showed his anger in the following manner. Not far from Jericho there stood another city called Ai. It was probably a much smaller place than Jericho. But Joshua sent some men to view the country. Misled by the size of the place, and somewhat over-confident after their victory at Jericho, these men returned to Joshua,

* A silver shekel was worth about 2s. 8d.; a shekel of gold about £2.

and told him that it was not necessary for all the Israelites to go and attack the place. "Let not all the people go up," they said, "but let about two or three thousand go up and smite Ai, for they are but few." This overconfidence proved fatal. The men of Ai sallied forth and beat back the three thousand Israelites, slaying thirty-six of them and chasing the others some distance. Elated as they had been by their previous victory, they were now just as much cast down, or, as the narrative tells us, "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water." Joshua, too, instead of attributing the defeat to his own lack of prudence, felt that it had been sent as a punishment, or as a mark of the Lord's displeasure, and "he rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord" crying out, "Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" This does not seem to have been very brave conduct on the part of Joshua, but you will readily understand that where every success was attributed to the direct act of God, every failure would also be deemed to be owing to His withdrawal of help, and this could only be because of something done which ought not to have been done, or something left undone which ought to have been done. There are people now who seem to think that their own want of success is owing to others, and very often to God, while all the time the fault lies with themselves alone. So we cannot be surprised that this writer should believe that his hero Joshua's failure here was owing to Achan's covetousness, and he tells us that the Lord told Joshua to get up and punish the man who had stolen the spoils. Joshua seems to have suspected the guilty man, and

assembling "Israel by their tribes," he selected "Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah," and said to him "My son, I pray thee, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me." Then Achan confessed his fault, and admitted that he had "sinned against the Lord God of Israel." Joshua seems to have determined to make a severe example of him, so Achan, "and the garment and wedge of gold, and his sons and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had," were brought unto the valley of Achor, or Trouble, and there he and his were stoned to death and their bodies burned. Then we are told "the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger," though, as it seems to me, the anger was a great deal more that of Joshua and the men who had been defeated at Ai, than of God.

The defeat which Joshua suffered, however, taught him experience, so when he went to attack them again, he did not make the mistake of despising his enemies. How he avenged the defeat and took Ai, you shall read for yourself. You will see that he had resort to a trick or stratagem.*

Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying, *Behold ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready: and I, and all the*

* Joshua viii. 3-25.

people that are with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them, (for they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, "They flee before us as at the first;" therefore we will flee before them. Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city; for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand.

And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire; according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.

Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai, and all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between them and Ai.

And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of the city. And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in

wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain ; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.

And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people that were in Ai, were called together to pursue after them : and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city, and there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel : and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, *Stretch out the spear that is in thine hand towards Ai ; for I will give it into thine hand.* And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city, and the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand : and they entered into the city, and took it, and hasted and set the city on fire.

When the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power

to flee this way or that way : and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.

And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai. And the other issued out of the city against them ; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side : and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape. And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it was that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai.

On this occasion the cattle and spoil of the city were allowed to be taken and kept by the Israelites, but the city itself was burned to the ground, and the king was hanged. It was not a generous action of Joshua to kill his opponent, whose only offence seems to have been that he had defended his city from the attacks of the fierce Israelites. No doubt Joshua was a brave man, but we

expect now-a-days that brave men, even in battle, should be generous to a fallen foe.

I do not think you would care to hear all that is told about Joshua, the many battles he is said to have fought, and the many kings he is said to have slain, and I am sure that it would not be very instructive reading for you. Altogether he is said to have killed thirty-one kings, or as we should now call them, chieftains, and the writer of the story of Joshua's doings tells us that "Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed," and he adds that all this was done "as the Lord God of Israel commanded," in which I think he was mistaken. Very probably this was but a way of stating that Joshua and the Israelites conquered the land. There was, however, one exception to this work of depopulating the country and destroying "all that breathed." The inhabitants of Gibeon, we are told,* "did work wilily," for they went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and taking old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles old, and rent, and bound up; old shoes clouted upon their feet, and old garments, and bread that was dry and mouldy, they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him and to the men of Israel, "We be come from a far country; now therefore make ye a league with us." But the men of Israel said to them, "Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?" They said unto Joshua, "We are thy servants." And he said, "Who are ye? and whence come ye?" Then they said, "From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the Lord thy God: for we have heard the fame

* Joshua ix. 4-11.

of him and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us saying, "Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, 'We are your servants; therefore now make ye a league with us.'" Then they pretended that their provisions, which they said were hot when they started, had got dry and mouldy, and they pointed to their bottles, or skins of wine, and their garments and shoes, all of which they said had got old by reason of "the very long journey" they had taken. All this deceived Joshua and the Israelites, and they made a treaty of peace with them. In the course of a day or two, however, they soon found out that instead of coming from a far country, the Gibeonites were neighbours, and they were very angry at the deception. Still they had sworn friendship, so they could not destroy them. The Israelites, however, enslaved them, or, as the narrative says, "Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord."

In the accounts of Joshua and his doings, there are many things that we now call legendary, that is, stories as to the truth of which we cannot feel sure, and which we must regard as highly improbable. In some of them there may be a little truth, though they are not altogether true. To show you what I mean, let us read what is said to have happened after Joshua had made the treaty with the Gibeonites. Five of the neighbouring kings entered into a league to destroy Gibeon because the inhabitants had made peace with Joshua, and they collected their armies together and encamped before Gibeon. The inhabitants, in great alarm, sent for Joshua to come up quickly and save them. He made a rapid march by

night from Gilgal, and attacking the five kings and their armies, "slew them with a great slaughter." Then the writer of the story adds that "it came to pass as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." Now it is quite possible that after a battle fought by Joshua, a great storm raged, and that the effect of this storm was to kill a number of his enemies. So much may be true, but it does not necessarily follow that the whole account just as we have read it is strictly true. The writer's great object was to make it appear that "the Lord" was on the side of Joshua and the Israelites, and he tells this story of the destruction of the army of the five kings by hailstones as a proof of this. Not only does he tell us this, but he gives a much more wonderful story.*

Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, *Sun, stand thou still upon Gibcon; and thou, Moon, in the Valley of Ajalon.*

And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

And there was no day like that before it or

* Joshua x. 12-14.

after it that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man : for the Lord fought for Israel.

No doubt a great many people still think this story to be literally true, but I cannot think so, and I will tell you why. We have learned that it is not the sun which moves round the earth, but the earth on which we live that moves round the sun. Now, if the earth were to stand still in its course round the sun it might be that to those who were left alive to observe it the sun would appear to stand still ; but if the earth were to stand still for even a single second the effect would probably be that all the people would be killed. The writer of this story did not know this ; it is only within a comparatively speaking recent period that we have learned it. He had therefore no difficulty in setting down the tradition he had heard, though we have very considerable difficulty in believing it.

The rest of the book of Joshua is taken up with describing how when the conquest of the greater part of Canaan had been effected, the land was divided among the twelve tribes, though the actual division did not probably take place till many years after. I may just mention, however, that in accordance with a law said to have been made by Moses, Joshua, in concert with his followers, appointed six large towns, which were to be called " cities of refuge," that is, " cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation." In those rough times men were permitted to avenge their own injuries in a way that could not be allowed now, and this provision of a refuge for men who had killed their fellows uninten-

tionally was a wise and merciful one. The six cities were :—

Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali,
Shechem in Mount Ephraim,
Kirjath-arba in Hebron in the mountains of Judah,
Bezer in the plain out of the tribe of Reuben,
Ramoth in Gilead, and
Golan in Bashan.

As you will often hear these cities named hereafter, you should look them out upon the map.

The time came that Joshua should die. He had grown old, and he had done his work. The Israelites had subdued many of the tribes that inhabited Canaan, and a period of rest had followed. Feeling his end approaching Joshua called together the elders and judges and officers of the people, and said to them—*

I am old and stricken in age ; ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you ; for the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you. Behold I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward.

And the Lord your God, he shall expel them before you, and drive them out of your sight ; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord

* Joshua xxiii. 2-16.

your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left ; that ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you ; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them : but cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day. For the Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong : but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day.

One man of you shall chase a thousand : for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you : know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you ; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth : and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you ; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.

Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you ; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them ; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you.

Soon after this address Joshua, we are told, died, and was buried "in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash." The stories we have read show that he was an adventurous and brave man. Indeed he must have had many of the qualities that help to make a man a leader of men, or he could not have done half that is recorded of him. The conquest of a large part of a country like Canaan, inhabited by fierce and warlike tribes, was no light or easy task. No wonder then that the Jews should hold his memory in reverence and respect, and that there should have grown up around it

many of the stories I have told you. At the same time we must not forget that the object of the writer of these was not so much to record a history, as to inspire his countrymen with a pride in their race and nation. Among the Jews neither the book of Joshua, nor that about which you will presently read, was regarded as an historical book: they were looked upon as books of warning and inspiration, warning against the danger which the Jews ran of forgetting the worship of God, by their friendly intercourse with the neighbouring tribes, and inspiration which should make them imitate the acts of valour which they found recorded.



The Judges.

THE Book of Judges records the doings of many of the leaders of the tribes after the death of Joshua. The word "Judges" did not bear the same meaning as that which it has in these days. When you hear of a Judge now-a-days, you naturally think of a man before whom persons charged with some crime are brought, and who, if they are found to be guilty, says how they are to be punished, or who, as we sometimes say, administers the law. But the "Judges" we are now going to read about were not men of this kind. I do not mean to say that they never adjudged disputes between men; perhaps they did; but they were men who by their excellent qualities were selected by the people to lead them when times of difficulty arose. They did not always lead the whole of the Israelites; they often only led some particular tribe. Some of them were distinguished for great personal courage, and there are stories told about them which are intended to magnify them, and to encourage those who

heard or read the stories to imitate their example. Some of these legends we will now read. They certainly show that both the Israelites and the Canaanites were very fierce and cruel ; indeed there was little to choose between them on this score. For instance, there is one story which tells how the tribes of Judah and Simeon attacked the Canaanites and Perizzites, and having captured their king, Adoni-bezek, they cut off his thumbs and his great toes, and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died. Cruel as this mutilation was, it seems to have been regarded by Adoni-bezek as a fitting punishment for his own cruelty in treating in an exactly similar way seventy other kings.

After the death of Joshua, we learn that "there arose another generation which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." These "forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger, and they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth." For this they were punished ; "whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, and they were greatly distressed." But when the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hands of the spoilers, they would not always pay heed to the judges, or when any one of these died they returned to their bad ways. All this, the writer tells us, made God angry with them, and by way of punishment He did nothing to help them to drive away some of the neighbouring nations, such as the Philistines, and the Amorites, and others, and to the kings of some of these they became tributaries. One of the Judges was Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, upon whom "the Spirit of the Lord came," and he led the Israelites successfully to throw off

the yoke of the king of Mesopotamia, whereby they obtained peace for forty years. But after his death the Israelites "did evil again in the sight of the Lord," and they came under the yoke of Eglon, the king of Moab. At last, at the end of eighteen years, one Ehud, a Benjamite, having induced Eglon to grant him a private audience, under the pretence of having a message from God for him, stabbed him, and fleeing to the mountains raised a revolt, which resulted in the conquest of Moab, followed by a peace of eighty years.

After Ehud came Shamgar, about whom all that we are told is that he was "the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad," and that "he also delivered Israel." And now I must tell you a story which seems to have given very great satisfaction to the Jews, but which, when you have read it, I hope you will agree with me in thinking is not one of which they have any cause to feel proud. After the death of Ehud, the Israelites having again fallen into bad ways, were conquered by Jabin, a king in Canaan, who reigned in Hazor, whose general, or "captain of the host" was named Sisera. At this time the Judge or leader of the Israelites was a woman named Deborah. She sent for one Barak, and commanded him to take "ten thousand men of the children of Naphthali and of the children of Zebulun," and go to the river Kishon, where he would meet Sisera "with his chariots and his multitude." Barak said he was willing to go if Deborah would go too. To this she consented; she said, "I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Barak and his ten thousand men, together with Deborah, went to Kedesh, near Mount Tabor. When Sisera heard of this he set out with his

army and "nine hundred chariots of iron," to meet Barak. Then a great battle was fought, which resulted in the defeat of "Sisera and all his chariots and all his host." Sisera was himself obliged to jump from his chariot and flee away on foot. The rest of the story you shall read as it is told in the Bible* :—

But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles : and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword ; and there was not a man left.

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite : for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, *Turn in, my lord, turn in to me ; fear not.* And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

And he said unto her, *Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink ; for I am thirsty.* And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

Again he said unto her, *Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, "Is there any man here?" that thou shalt say, "No."*

Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and

* Judges iv. 16-24.

went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, *Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest.* And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Now, I am sorry to say, that this horrible story is in all probability a true one. In the next chapter of the book of Judges there is given a song of Deborah, which is the oldest Israelite poem that has come down to us, and this song not only confirms the story, but adds some particulars which show Deborah to have had a most unwomanly nature, for she gloats over the sorrow of the mother of Sisera. I called this a horrible story, and do not you think it is too? Deborah calls Jael as "blessed above women"; we cannot so regard a woman who could thus treat a man whom she had invited to her tent for shelter and protection, bidding him have no fear, and whom when he was asleep and defenceless she foully murdered. The best that can be said for Jael is that in those times the fierce and brutal destruction of women and children, after the taking of any town, tended to make the women hard and cruel, and that judged by the opinions prevailing in those times she was no worse than many

others. But it would be very wrong for us to regard her action as meriting praise in the slightest degree.

I do not wish to linger long over this part of the history of the Israelites : it was a time when, owing to the unsettled state of the country, to the want of a leader like Moses or Joshua, there were continual fightings between the different bands or tribes of Israelites and the surrounding tribes. So that the Book of Judges is largely taken up with recording the legends and traditional accounts of the deeds of daring done by some of the various leaders or judges. But it is not altogether pleasant reading, and you will, I hope, be glad to get to something better. Perhaps at some later time you may wish to read for yourselves about Gideon, and how, by a clever stratagem, he, with three hundred men, surprised and utterly routed the army of the Midianites ; and about the doings of some of the other judges. I will content myself for the present with telling you about two, whose names were Jephthah and Samson.

As we learn from the story told by the writer of the Book of Judges, a time came when the Israelites were in sore straits by reason of the oppression of the Ammonites. The latter collected an army and encamped in Gilead, while the Israelites assembled at Mizpeh. But they were sadly in need of a leader : "What man," said they, "is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." The man they chose was Jephthah. When he was a young man he had been driven from his father's house by his brethren, and had fled to the land of Tob, where he gathered round him a number of "vain men"; in other words, a band of robbers. Jephthah himself had acquired the character of being "a mighty man of valour," no doubt from certain acts of personal bravery performed

on his marauding expeditions. So the elders of the people went to fetch Jephthah to come and be their captain and lead them against the Ammonites. Some of these elders seem to have formerly sided with his brethren, and he reminded them of this. Their distress, however, was too great to make them feel ashamed of their position : if he would but come to fight for them they would elect him "head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." So, on the faith of this promise, Jephthah consented to become their leader. He at once demanded of the King of the Ammonites the reason of his having come to Gilead. "What hast thou to do with *me*, that thou art come against *me* to fight in *my* land?" was the message he sent. The answer to this was that the Israelites had taken away his land ; but Jephthah would not allow that this was the case, and after some further parley he set out to attack the Ammonites. Before doing so, he did what was often done by great commanders in those times. They used to make a sacrifice to their gods, or they made a promise, if victory should be on their side, to make a handsome present to them. They thus hoped to propitiate or please their gods, and to get them to do something for them. Jephthah, we read, made "a vow unto the Lord and said, 'If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.'" Jephthah hoped to have God on his side by thus promising to sacrifice or destroy—he knew not what. These notions of sacrifice largely prevailed in those times. We have learned that it is not in this way that God is pleased. It is not the sacrifice or destruction of some innocent creature or thing

that He asks for, but the sacrifice, or giving up of some cherished habit which, pleasant as it may be, is only leading us to evil courses.

Jephthah attacked the Ammonites and defeated them "with a very great slaughter." Returning from his victory, as he was approaching his house, he heard the sound of music. These were probably some of his servants coming out with their timbrels to welcome the conquering hero. One of these would have to be sacrificed as he had vowed. But no ! it was not so. "And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances : and she was his only child." Judge of his grief when he remembered his rash vow. "And it came to pass when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter ! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me : for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.'"

And she said unto him, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth : forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon." One thing only she begged as a favour, that the sacrifice might be postponed for two months, in order that she might bewail her sad lot, a lot which condemned her to die without marriage, a fate which was almost regarded as a reproach by the Israelitish women. Jephthah consented to this, and at the end of the two months "she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow."

This is a pathetic story, and although in a way we may admire the fidelity Jephthah showed to his vow, we must always regard it as teaching the wickedness of making rash promises. We will now pass to the legends about Samson, but he deserves a chapter to himself.

Samson.

IN almost every nation there are stories or traditions of some hero, who at some far-off period had done wonderful things, or performed feats of great strength, or achieved some grand results in the face, sometimes, of serious difficulties, or under the special favour of good fortune. Some of these stories are not perhaps altogether untrue ; some are told of one man, when probably they are only true of several men. On the other hand there is often a great mixture of truth and fable, and we cannot be always certain which is the truth and which is not. Samson is one of these heroes, about whom some very extraordinary accounts are given.

There was, we are told, a man named Manoah, belonging to the family of the Danites. He had been married for some years, but no child had come to them. But one day an angel of the Lord appeared to the woman, and told her that she should have a son, who in course of time should "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Meanwhile she was not to drink wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. The child, too, was to be a Nazarite, that is, a person who abstained altogether from the juice of the wine, and allowed the hair of his head to grow. In process of time this son came, and the woman "called his name Samson ; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him."

When he had come to man's estate he began his work of delivering Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, though the way he is said to have gone about it was somewhat unusual. On one occasion he went to a place called Timnath, and there saw a Philistine woman, whom, he subsequently told his parents, he wished to make his

wife. They remonstrated with him, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the Philistines?" However, it seems that his desire for this woman was but part of his design against the Philistines, as you will see. Samson and his parents went again to Timnath, and on their way a young lion roared at Samson. He, with no weapon, seized the lion and "rent him as he would have rent a kid," but he did not tell his parents of his exploit. Arrangements for the marriage with the Philistine woman were made, and in due time he went to the marriage. On his way, "he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion, and behold there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion." He took some of this honey and gave it to his parents, without, however, telling them where it came from. In accordance with custom, Samson made a feast, to which thirty young men were invited. To these he said,* "I will now put forth a riddle unto you : if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments : but if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments." And they said, "Put forth thy riddle that we may hear it." So he said to them, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

And they could not in three days expound the riddle. On the seventh day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice thy husband that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire : have ye called us to take that we have?"

Samson's wife wept before him, and said, "Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not : thou hast put forth a

* Judges xiv. 12-18.

riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me." To this he answered that he had not even told it to his father and mother. Then she cried a good deal, and at last on the seventh day he told her, and she immediately told her people. Then just as the sun was going down they came to him and said, "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" "Yes," said he, "but if ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." In order to pay them what he had promised, we are told that he went to Askelon, and having slain thirty men, took from them the change of garments which he gave to them who had expounded the riddle. He was, or professed to be, angry at the trick that had been played upon him, and returned to his father's house, leaving his wife behind him.

After a while Samson went back for his wife, but he found that she had been given by her father to some one else. Here was the opportunity which he had been seeking, this was a sufficient justification for his working his vengeance on the Philistines. The story goes on to say that he caught three hundred foxes, and took some firebrands, which he fastened to the tails of the foxes, that is one to every two foxes, and then having set the brands on fire, he let them loose among the standing corn, vineyards and olives of the Philistines. When they found out who had done this, and why he had done it, they burned his wife and her father.

Without stopping at present to make any remark on this story, let us pass on to others. The Philistines determined to capture Samson, so they went after him with an army to Judah. Then the men of Judah, in order to save themselves, agreed to give up Samson, and they bound him with two new cords. When the Philistines

saw their enemy bound, they shouted for joy, but they rejoiced too soon. Samson burst his bonds, which "became as flax that was burnt with fire," and having a new jawbone of an ass he took it and slew a thousand men with it.

On another occasion Samson went to Gaza, and when the Gazites heard it, they compassed him in and laid wait for him all night, saying to themselves that in the morning they would kill him. But at midnight he arose and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and putting them on his shoulders, he carried them up to the top of a hill near Hebron.

At last the time came when he was to fall into the hands of his enemies, and that mainly through his own folly. It happened that he loved a woman named Delilah. The lords of the Philistines persuaded her to try and find out wherein his great strength lay, so that they might bind him. They promised to give her very large sums of money if she would do this, and she consented.* So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me, I pray thee, where thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee." Samson said, "If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man."

Then the lords of the Philistines brought her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, thou hast

* Judges xvi.

mocked me, and told me lies : now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound." He said, "If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak and be as another man."

Delilah therefore took new ropes and bound him, and said to him, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.

Delilah then said to Samson, "Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies : tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound." And he said to her, "If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web." So she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

Then she said to him, "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth."

At last she pressed him so hard that Samson got wearied, and he told her the secret. Said he, "There hath not come a razor upon mine head ; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my birth ; if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

Then when Delilah saw that he had told her the truth, she sent, false traitress as she was, for the Philistine lords, who came with the money they had promised as a reward of her treachery. While Samson lay asleep, she called a man and caused him to shave off his hair, and his strength went from him. Then she cried out again, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," and he awoke and said, "I will go out as at other times before and shake myself." But he knew not that it was not as at

other times, or, as the writer of the story tells us, "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, where they bound him with brazen fetters, and put him to grind corn in the prison.

After a time the hair of his head began to grow again. Meanwhile the Philistine lords determined to offer a sacrifice to their god Dagon ; whom they credited with having delivered Samson into their hands, so they gathered together a great assembly for the purpose. And when the people saw Samson they praised their god, shouting, "Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country who slew many of us." No wonder, if the stories we have read were only partly true, that the Philistines were glad : but, as we shall see, their rejoicing was but short-lived. When their joy was at its height and "their hearts were merry," they shouted, "Call for Samson, that he may make us sport." Then they called for Samson out of the prison house, and he made sport for them : and they set him between the pillars of the house.

Samson said to the lad that held him by the hand, "Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them."

Now the house was full of men and women ; and all the lords of the Philistines were there ; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

Then Samson called unto the Lord, and said, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."

Having uttered this prayer for vengeance, Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house

stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand and of the other with his left, saying, "Let me die with the Philistines." And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

Except that we are told that his brethren came and took away his body and buried him in his father's burying-place, and that he judged Israel for twenty years, this is all that we have to read about Samson. Whatever we may think of the feats of strength ascribed to him, there is nothing to admire in the character of Samson. He used his strength, no doubt, against the enemies of his people, but we nowhere find that he used it in any acts of kindness, such as we now expect strong and brave men to do. Then, with all his strength, he was weak enough to let himself be beguiled by Delilah into betraying the secret of his power, so that we feel inclined to say that it served him right, that he should have been captured by the Philistines. Then, too, we cannot help contrasting his prayer with that of another, who, when about to be put to a cruel death by his enemies, men to whom he had done no sort of wrong, could yet say, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." But there is a lesson that you may learn from this story, whether it be true or not. The writer of it himself points it out when he says that Samson, after he had told his secret, "wist not that the Lord was departed from him." The great power he is said to have possessed he held as a trust from God, and he had no right to do anything likely to betray this trust or weaken this power. And so all of us have in a greater or less degree powers given us by God. These we are bound to preserve, and not to

destroy : if we do any act that shall make them of no avail when the time comes for their being used, we, too, may find that God has, in a sense, departed from us ; we also may find that our neglect or betrayal has destroyed our strength.

You will remember what I told you in a previous chapter about the Books of Joshua and Judges, that they were not written so much as histories, as with the view of inspiring the Hebrews with a desire to emulate some of the heroic deeds, which had been preserved as legends and traditions, and of warning them against the neglect of the worship of God. The troubles into which they fell are all represented to have come from this neglect of God, and the writer or writers, for probably there were more than one, of the Book of Judges especially, strive to warn by their stories the people for whom they wrote. The period they describe was an unsettled one, long before the tribes had so banded themselves together as to become one nation ; as one of the writers says, a writer who probably looked upon the years when kings ruled the land as a better time for Israel, " In those days there was no king in Israel ; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."



The Story of Ruth.

THERE is a charming little story which you will, I think, like to read, and which is to be found in the Book of Ruth. Coming as it does in the midst of all the accounts of the wars and the fightings and the struggles between the Israelites and the surrounding tribes, there is a refreshing peacefulness about it, that makes us feel towards

the principal persons named in the story a sort of loving sympathy. It makes us feel, too, that in spite of the terrible doings of which we have read, there was, in the times of peace, a quiet homeliness of life which has a great charm. The story, too, gives us some little knowledge of Israelitish customs, especially in connection with marriage and with the holding and disposal of property. It may be well, before we go to the story, if I just explain one of these customs. Where two brothers were living together and one of them being married died without leaving a son, the widow was not to marry a stranger, but should wed her brother-in-law. If they had any children, then the eldest boy was to be considered the son of the first husband. If, however, the brother-in-law were unwilling to take upon himself the duty of thus marrying his brother's widow, she might complain to the elders of the place, and on his still declining to marry her, she was to draw off his shoe, and, after making an insulting gesture, to say, "Thus be it done to the man who refuses to preserve his brother's family." Some carried this custom further, and regarded it to be the duty not only of the brothers of a childless man, but of his other near relatives to marry her, rather than that she should go into the family of a stranger. You will remember that it was considered lawful in those times and among the Hebrews for a man to have more than one wife, and therefore there would not be so many difficulties in the way of carrying out such a custom as this, as there would be in countries and times like ours. You will see how all this has to do with the story of Ruth, to which we will now pass.

In the time of the Judges there lived a man named Elimelech. He was an inhabitant of Bethlehem in Judah, and his family consisted of his wife, whose name

was Naomi, and two sons named Mahlon and Chilion. It came to pass that there was a famine in Judah, so Elimelech went with his family to the country of the Moabites, which lay on the other or eastern side of the Dead Sea. Here they continued to live for some time, till at last Elimelech died. After his death his two sons married two women of the country, the name of one being Orpah and the other Ruth. For ten years longer they remained in Moab, but at the end of that time both Mahlon and Chilion died, leaving no children. Naomi was thus left a widow and childless. True, she had her daughters-in-law, but they could not be the same to her as her own children. No wonder then that she should feel a longing to get back to her own country and her own kindred. And this longing was strengthened when she heard "that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." She therefore determined to return to Judah, and set out for the purpose, accompanied at first by her two widowed daughters-in-law. There must have been something very attractive about Naomi, which thus induced Orpah and Ruth to go with her away from their own country and people to a strange land, and they, too, must have had very affectionate dispositions to make them wish to stay with her. Naomi felt it was a sacrifice on their part, a sacrifice she did not feel justified in accepting. "Go," she said, "return each to your mother's house ; may the Lord deal as kindly with you as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest each of you in the house of a husband." Then she kissed them ; and they lifted up their voice, and weeping said, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." But Naomi said, "Turn again, my daughters : why will ye go with me ? Have I any more sons that they may be your husbands ? Turn

again, my daughters, go your way ; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons ; would ye tarry for them till they were grown ? would ye stay for them from having husbands ? nay, my daughters ; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." Then they lifted up their voice, and wept again : and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law ; but Ruth clave unto her. Naomi said, " Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods : return thou after thy sister-in-law." But Ruth said, " Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." This beautiful and loving answer of Ruth quite overcame Naomi's scruples, and she ceased trying to persuade her to return. She felt that although there was not the tie that exists between a mother and child, there was the deep affection of two women to bind them together fully as strongly as if they had been more closely related. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come there all the city was moved about them, and they said, " Is this Naomi ?" And she said, " Call me not Naomi, call me Mara : for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty : why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me ?"

Naomi means pleasant or lovely, and Mara bitterness. She felt that the former name was no longer applicable

to her ; had not she lost her husband and her two sons, and was she any better off for the going to Moab ? Was not she in some way under the displeasure of God, else how He could have so dealt with her, and being under His displeasure, was it not bitterness itself ?

The time Naomi had chosen for her return to Bethlehem was in the beginning of barley-harvest, that is about April. And it was fortunate for her that she had so timed her coming back, for there was but little for them in the way of a living. There was one means, however, whereby they could manage to get some food ; it was the time of barley-harvest, and at least they could join the gleaners in the fields and pick up a little. But Naomi was no longer young, and she would find it hard for her to go stooping after the ears of barley as they lay on the ground. Ruth here showed that she had accompanied Naomi to be of use. There was a kinsman of Naomi's husband, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. He was "a mighty man of wealth," and among other possessions were some fields of barley. Ruth suggested to her mother-in-law that she should go into the fields and glean there, and with Naomi's consent she started. By chance she came into one of the fields belonging to Boaz, and while she was gleaning he came from Bethlehem, and greeting the reapers with the friendly phrase, "The Lord be with you," he asked the man who was set over the reapers who the damsel was. Then the servant told him that it was the Moabitish damsel that had come back with Naomi from the country of Moab, and that she had come to him begging to be allowed to glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves. Boaz had heard something of her story, which pleased him, so he spoke to Ruth kindly. "Hearest thou not, my daughter ? Go not to glean in another field, neither

go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens ; let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them ; have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee ? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn."

At these gracious words she fell on her face and bowed to the ground, saying, " Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger ? "

To this Boaz answered, " It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband : and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Then she said, " Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord ; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens."

Boaz replied, " At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar." And she sat beside the reapers, partaking of their meal. When she had risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, " Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not : and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not."

So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out that she had gleaned, which was about an ephah of barley.

This she took up, and went into the city : and when

her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, Naomi said, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee." So she told her mother-in-law, "The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz."

Then Naomi thanked God for His kindness, and said to Ruth, "The man is near of kin to us, he is one that hath right to redeem."

You will probably want to know what this right meant. It seems that if a man, in consequence of his having become poor, were obliged to sell his land, it was open to any of his kindred to redeem or buy it, so that it might be kept as much as possible in the family. You will remember that Elimelech had been compelled to leave his own country and go to Moab; he does not appear to have sold his land in Judah, so that when Naomi returned she was able to deal with it as she liked. You will see presently the plan she adopted; but we must return to the story.

After Naomi had told Ruth that Boaz had this kinsman's right, the latter further told her mother-in-law how Boaz had specially charged his young men to protect her, and Naomi rejoiced at this further instance of his kindness. Meanwhile Ruth availed herself of the opportunities for gleaning thus afforded her, and continued to dwell with Naomi.

Some little time after this, when the harvest was all got in, Ruth, by Naomi's instructions, placed herself again in the way of Boaz, and in reply to his inquiries as to who she was, told him that she was Ruth, his handmaiden, and that he was a near kinsman. Then Boaz bade her not to fear, "I will do to thee all that thou requirest; for all the city doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." True it was, he said, that he was a near kinsman, still

there was a nearer than he. If this one would perform his part, well ; but if he would not, then, said Boaz, " I will do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth." And he gave her some more barley, which she took to Naomi, who was well pleased at the turn matters were taking.

On the following day Boaz went to the gate of the city, and sat down there. While he was thus sitting, the kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken came by. Boaz called to him to come and sit down by him, and he having complied with this request, Boaz chose ten of the elders of the city, and said, " Sit ye down here." And they sat down. Then he said to the kinsman, " Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's : and I thought to advertise thee, saying, ' Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people.' If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it : but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know : for there is none to redeem it beside thee ; and I am after thee." And he said, " I will redeem it."

Boaz then told him that he would also have to marry Ruth, but this he was not prepared to do, so he said to Boaz, " Redeem thou my right to thyself ; for I cannot redeem it." To this Boaz immediately agreed, and he said to the elders, and to all the people, " Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place : ye are witnesses this day."

And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel : and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem : and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman."

So Boaz married Ruth, and in course of time a little son came to them, at which there were great rejoicings, and the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age : for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him."

Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it, and the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, "There is a son born to Naomi," and they called his name Obed : he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Thus ends the story of Ruth, a story which, I hope, now that you have read it, you think fully comes up to my description of it. David, about whom you will read hereafter, was one of the kings and heroes of Israel, and if he were descended from Ruth, we can well understand how the Hebrews recounted with pleasure the events that tended to throw such credit on his noble-minded ancestress. We, too, can feel how disinterested and kindly was the conduct of Ruth, and how entirely she deserved the honourable position she succeeded to : and we are thankful to get this little glimpse of quiet life in the old time, when so much, alas ! of bloodshed and misery seemed to have existed.

Samuel.

WE are now going to read about the last of the Judges, a man who, as he is presented to us in the Bible, seems to have been regarded not only as a ruler but as a seer or prophet. We get our knowledge of him from the first of the two books which in our version of the Bible bear his name. I say "our version," because in the *Vulgate*, or Roman Catholic version, they are called the first and second Book of Kings, while the two Books bearing that title in our version are, in the *Vulgate*, called the third and fourth Book of Kings. Indeed, if you look in the Bible as we have it, you will see that these are given as second titles to the books I have just mentioned. We do not know who wrote any of these books ; probably more than one writer had a hand in them, and they represent certain traditions, or stories handed down from time to time, about a man who occupied a prominent place in the history of the Jews.

There was a man named Elkanah. He lived at Ramathaim, or Ramah, which, if you look at the map, you will see lies midway between Jerusalem and Bethel. He belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. This man had, according to the custom then prevailing, two wives, the one named Hannah, the other Peninnah. The former had no children, while the latter had several. That a woman should be childless was looked upon as something in the nature of a disgrace ; it was thought she was out of favour with the Lord. Hannah's lack of children was therefore to her a sore trial, which was aggravated by the taunts of her more favoured rival. It was the habit of Elkanah to go with his wives and children once a year to worship, or attend some religious festival, at

Shiloh, which lies to the north of Bethel. It was at this place that, for a time at least, the ark of the Lord rested ; hence, no doubt, the reason why this yearly festival should be held there. It must have been a bitter thing to Hannah to see Peninnah, happy in her children, approach the altar to lay there the gifts which Elkanah had given her and her little ones, and this bitterness would increase year by year. There is no reason to doubt that Elkanah loved Hannah very dearly, but the love of husband was not enough to one who yearned to be able to bestow a mother's love on a child. On one of these occasions the sense of her position overcame her, "therefore she wept, and did not eat." Then Elkanah tried to comfort her, saying, "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" But she was not to be comforted ; she approached the temple of the Lord, and in the bitterness of her soul she prayed, weeping sorely all the time, "Oh, Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto her a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come on his head."

You will remember what I told you when we were reading about Samson, as to the meaning of this allowing the hair to grow.

This prayer of Hannah's was not uttered aloud, though her lips moved. There was, sitting at the door of the temple, the chief priest, Eli, and he, seeing her lips moving, but hearing no sound therefrom, "thought she had been drunken." So he said to her, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee." Hannah replied, "Nay, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful

spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial ; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto." Then Eli, seeing his mistake, sought to comfort her with soothing words, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." This apparent answer from the priest of the Lord to her petition cheered her so that she "went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." On the following day they all returned to Ramah.

In the course of time Hannah's desire was fulfilled, and she had a son, whom she called Samuel. When the time came for Elkanah to go again to Shiloh, Hannah declined to accompany him, saying that she would wait till the child was weaned, and then she would carry out her vow to dedicate him to the Lord's service. When she had weaned him they went to Shiloh, and having offered a bullock in sacrifice, brought the child to Eli, to whom she said, "Oh, my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed ; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him ; therefore also I have lent [or returned] him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

This is the account we have of the birth of Samuel and of his dedication to the ministry or service of the Lord. We can well understand the joy of Hannah that her heart's desire had been fulfilled, a joy that made her burst forth with this song of thankfulness and praise*—

My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord.

* 1 Samuel ii. 1-10.

My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation.

There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none besides thee ; neither is there any rock like our God.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly ; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

They that were full have hired out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry ceased :

So that the barren hath born seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

The Lord killeth, and maketh alive : He bringeth low, and lifteth up.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them.

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, for by strength shall no man prevail.

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces ; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them.

The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and He shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

So Samuel was left with Eli to "minister unto the Lord," and once a year, we are told, his mother made him a little coat and brought it to him, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. We are also told that Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, saying that they should have more children, because of "the loan which is lent to the Lord," and that this came true, though of the three sons and two daughters which they had we do not hear any more.

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phineas, who also were priests. They were however wicked men, and their conduct was so bad that they brought contempt upon the worship of the Lord. Eli remonstrated with them, "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?" But they hearkened not to him, and Eli seems to have contented himself with remonstrating, notwithstanding that he himself was warned, by "a man of God," that he and his house would pass away, and his sons both be killed in one day.

And now, as we are told, a remarkable event happened to Samuel. You shall read it just as it is told in the third chapter of the first book of Samuel.

And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord

was precious in those days ; there was no open vision. And it came pass at that time when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see ; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep, that the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, *Here am I.*

And he ran unto Eli, and said, *Here am I, for thou calledst me.* And he said, *I called not ; lie down again.* And he went and lay down.

And the Lord called yet again, *Samuel.* And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, *Here am I, for thou didst call me.* And he answered, *I called not, my son ; lie down again.*

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time, and he arose and went to Eli, and said, *Here am I, for thou didst call me.* Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child, therefore Eli said to Samuel, *Go, lie down, and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."* So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, *Samuel, Samuel.* Then Samuel answered, *Speak, for thy servant heareth.*

And the Lord said to Samuel, *Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And there I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.*

And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, *Samuel, my son.* And he answered, *Here am I.*

And Eli said, *What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto thee.* And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.*

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-

sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.

I have before told you that we must not take in a literal sense these accounts of conversations between God and men, which we meet with in the Bible. These old writers often used thus to express, what was really only a mental act, or as we sometimes say the thoughts that pass through our mind. May not the writer here have only tried to picture what passed through Samuel's mind? Had he not witnessed the wrong-doing of Eli's sons? Had he not seen that Eli himself was but a weak father? Ought he not to tell him what he believed would be the result of this weakness and wrong-doing? And yet Eli had been kind to him and he would feel some hesitation in speaking to him on the subject. But conscience, the real voice of God, spoke out, till at last he felt compelled to obey, and then, he told Eli "every whit, and hid nothing from him."

In due time, the story goes on to tell us, the fulfilment of the vision came to pass. The Israelites went out to battle against the Philistines at a place called Eben-ezer. A great battle was fought, which resulted in the defeat of the Israelites, much to their surprise. How could it have happened? "Why hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" they said to themselves. Then they determined to retrieve their defeat. "Let us," they said, "fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh, so that when it cometh, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." With this symbol of God's presence they thought victory was sure; their enemies would be terrified, and they themselves encouraged, but they were mistaken. The ark was brought to the camp under the care of Hophni and Phinehas, the two

bad priests ; the Israelites “shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.” When the Philistines heard the shouting, they wanted to know the meaning of it, and when they learnt that the ark had come to the camp they were frightened, crying out, “Woe unto us ! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us ! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods ? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and quit yourself like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you : quit yourselves like men, and fight.”

With shouts like these the Philistines attacked the Israelites, who were again defeated with great slaughter, and, worst of all, the precious ark was taken, and the two sons of Eli were killed. He was sitting on a seat by the wayside, waiting for news of the battle. He had grown old and blind, and he was anxious as to the fate of the ark. Presently there came a Benjamite who had run from the camp to Shiloh, and when he had told the news a great cry went up from the city. Then Eli asked what was the meaning of the tumult, and the Benjamite told him all that happened ; the Israelites had been defeated, Hophni and Phinehas had been killed, and the ark of God had been taken. When Eli heard this crowning sorrow of all he fell backward from the seat on which he was sitting, and in the fall his neck was broken and he died. Thus it was that Samuel’s forebodings came to pass, and the house of Eli ceased to be.



The First King.

THE capture of the ark by the Philistines of which we read in the last chapter, does not seem to have done the Philistines much good. The writer of the narrative tells us that they took and set it up by the side of the image of their god Dagon, but on the morrow, behold ! Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark. They set him up again, but lo ! on the morrow there was Dagon fallen on his face, "and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off, upon the threshold ; only the stump of Dagon was left to him." Besides this, we are told that the people of Ashdod, where the ark had been taken, were smitten with a grievous plague, which they believed was due to their having got the ark, so they passed it on to Gath, but here again the people of that place were smitten with the same plague, and they in turn carried the ark to Ehron. When the men of Ehron found that the same plague attacked them as had smitten the men of Gath and Ashdod, they called for their priests and diviners, who advised them that the ark should be returned to the Israelites, and accordingly this was done.

The victory of the Philistines at Ebenezer had placed the Israelites for a time at least under their yoke. Samuel warned them that if they wished to escape from the tyranny of the Philistines they must return unto the Lord with all their hearts, and put away strange gods from among them, and serve the Lord only. After a time his warnings had sunk deep into the minds of the Israelites, and they "served the Lord only." Then Samuel gathered them together at a place called Mizpeh, where the Philistines came to attack them. But a severe

storm completely discomfited the Philistines, and the Israelites taking advantage of that, and believing that it showed the Lord was on their side, smote their enemy and utterly routed them. So the Israelites got back again the territory they had previously conquered, and during Samuel's life we are told, "the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines."

Samuel continued to judge Israel for many years, but it came to pass that in time he grew old, and he made his sons Joel and Abiah judges. These men were very different from their father ; they took bribes and did not do justice. This conduct utterly disgusted the people, and they asked Samuel to make them a king, like the other nations around. Samuel does not seem to have liked the idea ; he pointed out to them that if they had a king, he would act in a very tyrannical manner to them, and the time would come when they would cry out at his treatment of them, but the Lord would pay no attention to their cry. Nevertheless they would have a king, and Samuel at last promised them one. He called the Israelites together at Mizpeh, and here the king was chosen by lot, the lot falling upon Saul, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, a man who when he stood among the people "was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." There is another story told about this choice of Saul, which is intended to show that he was selected by Samuel, not by lot, but this story it is scarcely necessary for us to read now.

The selection of Saul was not pleasing to all the Israelites, but he very soon overcame the objectors. The Ammonites under a leader named Nahash had come to attack a place called Jabesh or Jabesh-gilead. The men of this place were willing to make terms with him, but he imposed such a cruel condition of peace

that they implored him to give them an opportunity of getting help from their brethren in other parts of Israel. For some wholly inexplicable reason he assented to this. Some of the messengers came to Saul, who when he heard of what had happened was greatly angered. Then he sent out messengers to summon the Israelites to go to the relief of the men of Jabesh-gilead, and with a great force he attacked and completely dispersed the Ammonites. Then some of his followers wanted him to punish those who had objected to his being king, and to put them to death, but this he refused to do. He said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day, for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." His victory coupled with his generous words overcame the objectors. We are told that Samuel said to the people, "Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal, and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

I am now going to tell you a story which will illustrate what very curious notions were entertained about God at that time. Apparently the Israelites were very badly furnished with weapons. It had been the policy of the Philistines to prevent the arming of the Israelites, and on one occasion it happened that neither sword nor spear was to be found in the hands of any save Saul and his son Jonathan. At this time the Philistines were encamped at a place called Michmash. One day Jonathan said to his armour-bearer, "Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side." But he did not tell his father of what he was going to do. In the way by which Jonathan sought

to reach the Philistines' garrison there was a sharp rock on either side, Jonathan said to his armour-bearer, "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." The armour-bearer was quite ready to follow him wherever he went. Then Jonathan said "We will pass over unto these men, and will discover ourselves unto them. If they say, 'Tarry until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say, 'Come up unto us,' then we will go up, for the Lord hath delivered them into our hand, and this shall be a sign to us.'"

Then they both suddenly discovered themselves to the Philistine garrison, and the Philistines said, "Behold the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves." And the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his companion, "Come up to us and we will show you a thing." Then Jonathan said to his armour-bearer, "Come up after me, for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel." And Jonathan and his armour-bearer climbed up upon their hands and feet, and the garrison fled before him. In the first onslaught Jonathan and his companion slew twenty men, and a great fear came upon the garrison, so that they scarcely recognized each other, and began to strike one another down. Saul's watchmen saw what was going on, and called his attention to it. Then he had the roll of his men called to find out who it was that had gone and made this attack, and found it was his son Jonathan and his armour-bearer. Then Saul advanced to attack the Philistines, who were much harassed. To complete their discomfiture, some Hebrews, who were with them in their camp, turned round upon them. So the Philistines fled, and the victory remained to the Israelites.

Now, during the day Saul had strongly urged the people not to delay in their work, even to eat their food : "Cursed," said he, "be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies." Jonathan had not heard his father say this, and knew nothing of it. In the course of the pursuit, they came to a wood, where there was some honey on the ground. None of the people who had heard Saul's oath stopped to eat this honey, but Jonathan dipped the end of a rod he had in his hand into the honey-comb and put it to his mouth. Then one of the Israelites, seeing this, told him what his father had said. Jonathan was vexed that his father had been so foolish. He saw clearly enough what the consequence would be, namely, that the people would be faint, and would not be able to make so entire a destruction of the Philistine camp as they would otherwise. Besides, when they came to the spoil of the camp, so famished were they, that they could not wait till the sheep and oxen which they had killed had been cooked—they ate the raw flesh. At this offence, as it was considered, Saul was wroth. Then Saul wanted to go and follow up the Philistines by night, and he "asked counsel of God" whether he should do this, but he got no answer. This, he felt, must be due to some sin having been committed, and he swore a great oath, that the man who had done it, "though it be Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But no one would say a word, and he determined to see if he could find the offender by the casting of lots, and lo, the lot fell upon Jonathan. Then he asked Jonathan what had he done, to which Jonathan replied that he had but tasted a little honey, "and lo, I must die." Saul said, "God do so and more also ; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."

Now you will see that this was very hard upon Jonathan, who really had done nothing wrong. He had not

heard his father's orders, so that he could not be said to have disobeyed them. And yet Saul seems to have thought that God was angry with him because Jonathan had done what he had. If one of you does something which is not wrong in itself, but which your parent or teacher does not wish you to do, it may be wrong of you to do it, if you know they do not wish it; but if you do not know it, it is not wrong, and your parents or teacher would be very unreasonable if they punished you for doing it. Was it not strange, therefore, that Saul should have supposed that God would be angry at Jonathan's act? Happily the people were more sensible than Saul. "Shall Jonathan die," they said, "who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid; as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan that he died not. Saul shows himself in this story hasty and imperious; and as we shall see later on, this kind of thing grew upon him, and he became jealous and cruel.



Saul and David.

THE victory gained by the intrepidity of Jonathan, about which you read in the last chapter, did not put an end to the fighting. We read that "there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him."

Although Saul was called the king of Israel, he seems rather to have been a military leader—at any rate during Samuel's life,—because we find Samuel instructing him

to go and attack the Amalekites, and to destroy all that they had, "both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." In connection with this, the story, as it is told to us, makes out Samuel to be a very blood-thirsty man, and pictures God to us in a way very terrible to think of. The idea the writer seems to have had about God is so horrible that we cannot believe the story to be true, but it shows the sort of notion men then entertained of Him whom we have come to regard as a just, merciful, and loving Being. Saul, we are told, went to attack the Amalekites and defeated them, and while he caused a great many to be put to death, he spared Agag, their leader, and the best of the sheep, and oxen, and lambs, and only destroyed every thing that was vile and refuse. Then, the writer tells us, the Lord said to Samuel that he was sorry he had made Saul king, because he would not do as he was told. Samuel sought Saul and told him the Lord was angry with him, but he excused himself that the people had taken the spoil, sheep and oxen, in order to sacrifice to the Lord. But this did not satisfy Samuel. "Hath the Lord," said he, "as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Then Saul confessed that he had done wrong because he had feared the people, and obeyed their voice: he begged Samuel to pardon him, but this he declined to do; "thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel," said Samuel. At last Saul succeeded in appeasing his wrath, and they made up their differences before the people. Then Samuel ordered Agag to be brought to him, and when he was come he slew him, or, as the writer of the narrative tells us, "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before

the Lord in Gilgal." Then Samuel and Saul returned to their homes, and "Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death ; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul.

As I said just now, this story is a very terrible one : it comes to us from a time of barbarism, when human life was deemed of less value than it is now, and when it never occurred to him who wrote it that it made out God to be of vengeful, fierce, and cruel temper. The more beautiful notion of God as a loving father was one of much later growth. I have before explained to you that many of these stories cannot be regarded as true or historical. They were often written for the purpose of showing the Might of God, and of warning the people from disobedience to His laws, and from worshipping other gods. Possibly the writer of this story had some such notion in his mind when he told it. Be this as it may, there is no reason why we should imagine that God would be pleased with the wholesale destruction of men, women, and children, or be offended because His supposed instructions were not carried out to the letter.

I am now going to tell you about one of the Jewish heroes, to whose doings a large space is given in the Old Testament records. Except perhaps Moses there is more told us about David than any other personage in the Old Testament. The shepherd boy who became king, and who is said to have written some of the beautiful psalms which were sung in the temple worship, and perhaps in their homes, had a great fascination for the Jews, as the stories that are told about him sufficiently show. These stories are collected in the first and second books of Samuel, and some of these you shall read for yourselves, as far as possible in the words of the Bible itself.

David is first brought to our notice in a story or legend which is told, to show how he became entitled to be king of Israel. Samuel we are told was directed by the Lord to go to one Jesse the Bethlehemite, who had several sons, one of whom was to be king of Israel in the place of Saul. At first Samuel hesitated ; he was afraid lest if Saul heard he was going on such a journey, the king would kill him. He was, however, reassured, and went as he was told. When he had come to Bethlehem he called Jesse and his sons to sacrifice to the Lord. The first of the sons to come was Eliab, and judging from his appearance Samuel at first thought that this must be the favoured one. " Surely," he said, " the Lord's anointed is before him," But it was not so, the story goes on to say :*

But the Lord said unto Samuel, *Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*

Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, *Neither hath the Lord chosen this.* Then Jesse made Sham-mah to pass by. And he said, *Neither hath the Lord chosen this.* Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, *The Lord hath not chosen these.*

And Samuel said unto Jesse, *Are here all thy children ?* And he said, *There remaineth yet the*

* I Samuel xvi. 7-13.

youngest, and behold he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said to Jesse, *Send and fetch him, for we will not sit down till he come hither.*

Then he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look at. And the Lord said, *Arise, anoint him, for this is he.*

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.

In this way the fact that David, the shepherd lad, became entitled to be king is told to us. You see when Jesse was told of the honour that was to be bestowed upon one of his sons he could scarcely imagine it was the youngest. Was not there the tall and manly Eliab, were there not eight others all grown up and ready for the great duties? It could never be that David, the ruddy handsome stripling, who was only fit to look after the sheep, was meant to fill the high position. And yet it was none other than he. How he eventually came to be king we shall see later on.

There is more than one story of how David came to meet Saul. I expect that the writers of the Book of Samuel knew that there were more than one, and they did not pretend to decide which was the true one. They preferred to tell them all. The first we will now read*—

The spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

* 1 Samuel xvi. 14-23.

And Saul's servants said unto him, *Behold now an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our Lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on a harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand and thou shalt be well.*

And Saul said unto his servants, *Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.*

Then answered one of the servants, and said, *Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.*

Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, *Send me David thy son which is with the sheep.* And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, *Let David, I pray thee stand before me, for he hath found favour in my sight.*

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand, so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

Here, you see, David's skill on the harp was the cause of his knowing Saul. The king was the subject of fits of melancholy, or of some kind of madness from which he was aroused, or soothed, as might be, by music which often has a pleasing effect upon persons in this sad state. In the next story we shall see that the writer introduces David to Saul under somewhat different circumstances ; in that you have just read, it is David's musical skill that is extolled ; in what is to follow, it is his bravery.*

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side : there was a valley between them.

There went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had an helmet of brass upon his head, and was armed with a coat of mail ; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders, the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam ; and his spear's

* I Samuel xvii.

head weighed six hundred shekels of iron : and one bearing a shield went before him.

And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, *Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.*

And the Philistine said, *I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.*

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

The three eldest sons of Jesse followed Saul to the battle; Eliab the first born, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah: David the youngest went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days. And Jesse said unto David his son, *Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the*

captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.

Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army.

David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren: and as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them.

All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were sore afraid. And they said, *Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.*

David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, *What shall be done to the man that killeth*

this Philistine and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, *Why camest thou down hither? with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.*

David said, *What have I now done? Is there not a cause?* And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner. And when the words were heard which David spoke, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

David said to Saul, *Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.* Saul said to David, *Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.*

Then David said to Saul, *Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock, and I went out*

after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth : and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear : and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, *The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.* Saul said unto David, *Go, and the Lord be with thee.*

Then Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head ; also he armed him with a coat of mail. David girded his sword upon his armour, and assayed to go ; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, *I cannot go with these ; for I have not proved them.* And David put them off him.

Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip ; and his sling was in his hand : and he drew near to the Philistine, who came on and drew near unto David ; and the man that bare the shield went before him.

When the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him : for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

And the Philistine said unto David, *Am I a*

dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods, and said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

Then said David to the Philistine, *Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel; and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands.*

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sank into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the ground.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philis-

tine, and slew him ; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore he ran and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled, and the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines to the valley and the gates of Ekron.

David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem ; but he put his armour in his tent.

When Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine he said to Abner, the captain of the host, *Abner, whose son is this youth?* Abner said, *As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.* And the king said, *Enquire thou whose son the stripling is.*

As David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand, and Saul said to him, *Whose son art thou, young man?* And David answered, *I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.*

This brave feat greatly endeared David to the people. And as one truly brave man, who is not governed by the spirit of jealousy, can know and appreciate another's bravery, so we find that Jonathan, whose courageous attack on the Philistines you remember to have read

about in another chapter, soon formed a close friendship with David. We read :—

It came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely : and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, *Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*

Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased

him ; and he said, *They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands : and what can he have more but the kingdom ?* And Saul eyed David from that day forward.

By this is doubtless meant that Saul regarded David with disfavour, for we read afterwards how Saul, possessed by an evil spirit, which, I should say, was none other than that of jealousy, tried to bring about David's destruction. On two occasions he cast his javelin, or short spear, at David, threatening to smite him to the wall with it. Then he appointed him to a high military post, and promised to give him his elder daughter Merab for his wife, if he would be valiant and fight the Lord's battles, hoping thus that he would meet his death. But when the time came when Merab should have married David she was given to some one else. But Michal, Saul's other daughter, loved David, and Saul thought that here was another opportunity of getting rid of his rival. So he got his servants to suggest to David that if he would perform some mighty feat of valour he would be able to marry Michal, and become the king's son-in-law ; but Saul did this because he "thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines." David did however what was required of him, and Saul was obliged to give him his daughter. Then, the writer tells us, "Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal loved him. And Saul was yet the more afraid of David ; and Saul became David's enemy continually," but "David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by," or very precious.

This is a sad falling off in the character of Saul from the days when he was chosen king, and the spirit of the Lord was said to be on him. We see how gradually he allowed bad passions to get the mastery over him, so that he was led to be vengeful and treacherous to one of his ablest servants, who had committed no offence, but who had saved his kingdom from its enemies. So malicious was Saul that he ordered Jonathan to kill David, but Jonathan warned David of this, and bade him hide till he could bring his father to a better state of mind. Then we read* :—

Jonathan spake good of David to Saul his father, and said unto him, *Let not the king sin against his servant David ; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good : for he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel : thou sawest it, and didst rejoice ? wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause ?*

And Saul hearkened to the voice of Jonathan : and Saul sware, *As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.*

Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

* 1 Samuel xix. 4-7.

This did not last long however, and we find Saul forgetting all about his oath, and trying to smite David with his javelin, so that he had to make his escape. Saul sent messengers to David's house to slay him, but Michal warned him, and she let him down through a window, and thus enabled him to escape.

Jonathan, as you have seen, dearly loved David ; there is an interesting story told about this affection they had for each other which you may like to read. David had fled to Samuel in Ramah. After a time he came to Jonathan, and said to him, "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?"

And Jonathan said, "God forbid ; thou shalt not die : behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me? and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so."

Then David said, "Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes ; and he saith, 'Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved : ' but truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death."

Then said Jonathan to David, "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee."

Then said David, "Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat : but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city : ' for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he say thus, 'It is well ; ' thy servant shall have peace : but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant ; for thou hast

brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee : notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself ; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father ? ”

Jonathan said, “ Far be it from thee : for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee ? ”

Then said David, “ Who shall tell me ? or what if thy father answer thee roughly ? ”

Jonathan said to David, “ O Lord God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to-morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee ; the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan : but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace : and the Lord be with thee, as he hath been with my father : and thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not : but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever : no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth. ”

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “ Let the Lord even require it at the hand of David’s enemies. ” And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him : for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Then Jonathan said to David, “ To morrow is the new moon : and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty : and when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a

mark : and I will send a lad saying, ‘Go, find out the arrows.’ If I expressly say unto the lad, ‘Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them ;’ then come thou : for there is peace to thee, and no hurt ; as the Lord liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, ‘Behold, the arrows are beyond thee ;’ go thy way : for the Lord hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the Lord be between thee and me for ever.”

This plan Jonathan proceeded to carry out, David meanwhile keeping himself in hiding. Saul was, or affected to be, very wroth at David’s absence, and when Jonathan excused him, Saul actually tried to slay him too. Jonathan knew, therefore, that David would not be safe if he came to Saul, so he went close by where David was hiding and did exactly as he had arranged with him, “But the lad knew not anything,” and Jonathan sent him back to the city. As soon as he was gone, David came to Jonathan, and the two friends kissed each other and wept together bitterly. At last the time came to say farewell : Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever.’” Then David departed, and Jonathan returned to the city. Of the former’s adventures, till he became king of Israel, we will read in another chapter ; but I hope you have observed the nobility of Jonathan’s nature, and the sterling character of his friendship for the man, who, it was thought, would one day take the place which he might have hoped would be his. But there does not seem to have been any jealous thought in him, only the strong affection and generous regard we expect in a true friend.

David—Outlaw and King.

As you have seen, David was now compelled to flee from the presence of Saul, and he became a wanderer, and the leader of a band of men who attached themselves to him. Saul tried many means to get rid of David, who was compelled to flee from place to place so as to avoid the king's wrath. On one occasion we read that he reached a place called Nob, where the priest called Ahimelech, taking pity on his hungry condition, gave him some of the "hallowed bread," or bread used in the worship of the Lord, there being no other, or "common bread." Those of you who have read the narrative of the life of Jesus told in the Gospels, may remember that when he was blamed by the Pharisees for allowing his disciples to eat corn on the Sabbath-day he referred* to this story of David—"how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests."

On another occasion David was obliged to flee for protection to Achish, the king of Gath. Here, however, he soon found that the people recognized him as the man who had killed their famous champion Goliath. In order to save his life, he feigned madness, and when brought before the king, the latter would have nothing to do with him. So David departed and escaped to the cave Adullam, and here, we are told, that he was not only joined by his brethren, but that "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and

* Matthew xii. 3, 4; Mark ii. 25, 26; Luke vi. 3, 4.

every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him ; and he became a captain over them.”

David and his band of outlaws, as we should call them, employed themselves in attacking the Philistines, but even this did not satisfy Saul, who pursued David with relentless energy, and on more than one occasion was nearly successful in compassing his destruction. There is a story told about David, in connection with this part of his history, that shows him to have been then a generous and noble man. You shall read it for yourselves.*—

It came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, *Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.*

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats, and he came to the sheepecotes by the way, where was a cave ; and Saul went in to cover his feet,† and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

And the men of David said to him, *Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, ‘ Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee.’* Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because

* 1 Samuel xxiv. 1-15.

† To rest.

he had cut off Saul's skirt, and he said to his men, *The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.*

So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, *My Lord the king.* And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

David said to Saul, *Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, 'Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?' Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, 'I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed.' Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the pro-*

verb of the ancients, 'Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.' After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

You see that David had Saul entirely in his power, and few persons would have been disposed to blame him had he availed himself of his opportunity to do what his followers suggested, and had slain Saul. Such was not, however, the character of David, at any rate at that time of his life. His noble generosity seems to have touched Saul.

And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, *Is this thy voice, my son David?* And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept: and he said to David, *Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king,*

and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear now, therefore, unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house.

And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold.

Apparently, Saul kept his promise and ceased to trouble or molest David, for although there is an account given of how David on another occasion, when Saul had come to attack him, spared the king's life when it was in his power, yet I cannot help thinking it is only another version of the same story. Probably both were told of David, and the writer or writers of this book, not attempting to say which was the right one, inserted them both in the narrative. David, however, does not seem to have placed much faith in Saul's promises, for we find him taking service under Achish, the king of Gath, who is said to have granted to him as a dwelling-place the town of Ziklag. He does not seem, though, to have raised his hand against his own countrymen, but to have attacked the surrounding nations. On one occasion it is true he accompanied the Philistines on an expedition against the Israelites, but while Achish had complete confidence in him, the leading men of the Philistines feared least he should take them unawares for the purpose of being completely reconciled to Saul, so he was sent back.

And it was well he returned. In his absence Ziklag had been taken by the Amalekites, who had set it on fire, and taken the women of the place captives, among

whom were David's two wives, one named Ahinoam, and the other Abigail, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance," who had been the wife of a churlish evil-doer named Nabal. What had become of Michal, you will perhaps ask? In those days men, even good men, did not treat women with the same respect that we have learned to extend to them now-a-days, and so we find that Michal had been given by her father to be the wife of another man, wholly regardless of the fact that she was already David's wife.

David pursued the Amalekites and rescued his two wives, and recovered all that the former had taken away. The time was now coming when his wandering life should cease, and he become king. Saul met with his death in a battle with the Philistines at Gilboa. We are told that in this battle the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, his sons.

And the battle went against Saul, and he was sore wounded of the archers. Rather than fall into the power of his enemies, he preferred death at his own hands. "Draw thy sword," he said to his armour-bearer, "and thrust me through therewith ; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me." But his armour-bearer would not. Therefore, Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. When his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. "So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together."

And on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. Then they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people, and they put his

armour in the house of Ashtaroth, and fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, the valiant men arose, and went at night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And their ashes they buried under a tree at Jabesh.

Such was the end of Saul the first king of Israel ! The character of Saul as shown to us is not a pleasing one. The high expectations that were formed of him by the people when they elected him king were not realized. The sudden rise in position seems to have turned his head, and to have made him a moody, jealous, revengeful, weak man.

His rival David seems, however, to have mourned his death ; he probably remembered Saul on those occasions when he was at his best. He was, too, the father of his friend Jonathan, and of his wife Michal, and this fact had possibly some weight with him. At any rate we find him lamenting the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in a song which is a very beautiful one, and which you may like to read.*

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places : how are the mighty fallen !

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon ; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of

* 2 Samuel i. 19-27.

offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

David was at Ziklag when the news of Saul's death reached him. He did not succeed to the throne at once. Abner, the captain of Saul's host, set up Ishbosheth, a son of Saul, as king of Israel, and for a time at least David was only king of Judah. Ishbosheth was, however, ultimately slain by an act of treachery for which David punished the perpetrators. His death made the way clear for David to be king of Israel, he then being only thirty years old.

David, King of Israel.

AFTER Saul's death David had succeeded in attracting to him a number of brave and valiant men. In the first book of Chronicles the names of some of these men, and the nature of their exploits, are told us. Among them was one Jashobeam, who had with his spear slain three hundred men at one time; another was a man named Eleazar, who on one occasion alone withstood and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary and clave to his sword; and another named Shammah, who, when the Philistines had gathered themselves together to battle in the midst of a barley field, and had put the other followers of David to flight, had stood in the field and delivered it from the Philistines. Then there was another named Benaiah, whose feats of strength and valour had gained for him great renown. He had slain "two lion-like men of Moab," and once during the snowy season, when the wild beasts are particularly ravenous, he had gone into a pit where was a lion, and slew it. He had also fought with an Egyptian over seven feet high, who carried a spear like a weaver's beam, having himself only a staff in his own hand, and had slain his foe. The following act of bravery by three of David's chief men is also recorded. The Philistines were at one time in Bethlehem, and David was with his followers in the cave of Adullam. One day feeling very thirsty, David said, "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate." He little thought that his wish would be soon gratified. Three of his followers, on hearing David's words, "brake through the host of the Philistines,

and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David," but he would not drink it. "God forbid," he said, "that I should do so : shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy?" Therefore he would not drink it, but "poured it out to the Lord."

No wonder that surrounded by such men as these, and by Benjamites, who "could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow," and by Gadites, men of might who could handle shield and buckler, "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were swift as the roes upon the mountains," David soon acquired the throne, and made his title to it sure. Unhappily this accession to power was followed by a deterioration in his character as a man. His rule, too, must have been severe, otherwise it is difficult to understand how, when his son Absalom revolted against him, he should have had a large following. There was one man, a prophet called Nathan, who had the courage to rebuke David for his wrong-doing. David, although he had already several wives, had coveted Bathsheba, the wife of one of his followers named Uriah, and had sought to make her his wife. He laid a plot to kill Uriah, which was successful, and it is to this act of treachery and wickedness that Nathan referred in the following narrative.*—

The Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, *There were two men in one city ; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds : but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and*

* 2 Samuel xii, 1-14.

nourished up : and it grew up together with him, and with his children ; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich Man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him ; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man ; and he said to Nathan, *As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die : he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*

Nathan said to David, *Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, " I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul ; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah ; and if that had been too little I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight ? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house ;*

because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

And so it came to pass. While the child lay sick, David fasted and prostrated himself on the ground, but when it was dead "he arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped." Then he came into his own house, and, much to the surprise of his servants, began to eat. But, said he, "While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Bathsheba had another son, whose name was Solomon. Although he was not strictly entitled to the throne of his father, yet David proclaimed that Solomon should be his

successor. Absalom, another of his sons, of whom it is said that "in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty," had rebelled against his father. To put down this rebellion David sent out an army under three different leaders, charging them at the same time to deal gently for his sake with the young man Absalom. A battle was fought, resulting in the dispersion of the rebels. In seeking to escape, Absalom's head got caught in a tree. Here Joab, one of David's generals, found him and killed him.

David, we are told, sat between the two gates of the city waiting for the news. Presently a man was seen running as fast as he could towards him. Although David was no doubt anxious to hear that the rebellion was crushed, yet his first thought was of his son, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" said he; but the messenger could not tell him. Then there came another messenger, and the king addressed him in the same words. This man told him what had happened, and "the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept:" and as he went his great sorrow found vent in these touching words, "O, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

One of the first things that David did when he came to the throne was to bring the Ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem, where he had established his court. He wished to build a temple for it, but this, we are told, he was not permitted to do. He, however, collected together many of the materials for its erection, the task of which was reserved for Solomon. In the record of David's reign there are told some very sad stories of cruelty. I have not thought it well to speak to you of them all here, because they are not particularly edifying. I do not mean

that David himself was a specially cruel man ; he did but follow the customs of his times, and we can scarcely in fairness judge the men of those times in the same way we should do those of our own. We find, however, that it was after he had become a king that his character became worse. While he was being persecuted by Saul there is much in his life that we cannot help admiring, but when he became a powerful king he shewed himself in a very different light, having most of the vices and few of the virtues of a despot.

We read about David in the second book of Samuel, the first book of Kings, and the first book of Chronicles. The writer of the last-named book was probably a Levite, or belonging to the tribe of Levi, from which the priests were selected. At any rate he was friendly to the priestly party, and in his account of David he omits some of the stories that do not redound to the king's credit, but he tells us some things of which no mention is made elsewhere. You remember that I told you that David, though desirous of building a House or Temple for God, was not permitted to do this. But the writer of the book of Chronicles tells us that he collected the materials for this temple, and that he called the people together in a solemn assembly, and having told them how greatly he had at heart the building of this "palace," which was "not for man, but for the Lord God," and how he had himself given of his own possessions towards its erection, asked them, "Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" Then we are told that the wealthy men among them, the chiefs, and princes, and captains, and rulers offered willingly, so that the people and David "rejoiced with great joy." But he did not omit to give praise and glory to God for all this, as you will see from the follow-

ing psalm of thanksgiving which David is said to have uttered.*

David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said—"Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty.

For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were also our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.

O Lord, our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy

* 1 Chronicles xxix. 10-19.

name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.

I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee.

O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.

And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

Then David called upon the congregation to bless the Lord their God, and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord and the king.

All this happened shortly before his death, and the writer in Chronicles tells us that "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour," having, we are told, reigned forty years, seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem.



Solomon.

DAVID was succeeded by his son Solomon, who, you will remember, had been proclaimed king by David in his life-time. Solomon had the reputation of being very wise : we are told that "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore." There is a legend connected with this divine gift of wisdom told of Solomon in the first book of Kings. He had gone to Gibeon to sacrifice, and while he was there we are told the Lord appeared to him in a dream by night, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon replied, "Thou hast shown to thy servant David, my father, great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee ; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father ; and I am but a little child : I know not how to go out or come in. Thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad : for who is able to judge this thy so great a people ?" And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life ; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies ; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judg-

ment ; behold, I have done according to thy words : lo ! I have given thee a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour ; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." And Solomon awoke ; and behold it was a dream.

There is also another story told to illustrate his wisdom. Two women came to the king one day, and one of them begged him to judge between her and her companion in the following circumstances. They both lived together in the same house, and each had a little child. One night one of the children died, and its mother took the dead child to the other mother while she slept, and took away from her the living child. In the morning the mother of the living child found the dead one beside her, but she was certain it was not hers. The other woman, however, claimed the living child, and the real mother now begged Solomon to decide to whom it really belonged. To do this was a difficult task ; but Solomon hit upon a happy expedient. "Bring me," he said, "a sword ;" and when this was brought, he commanded one of his servants to cut the child in halves, and give one half to one woman, and the other half to the other. Then the mother of the child said to the king, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the false mother said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Then the king said, "Give her (the real mother) the living child, and in nowise slay it, she is the mother thereof." This decision pleased the people, and greatly raised him in their estimation.

Solomon, too, is credited with a large amount of culture and knowledge. One writer says, "he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five," and he adds that "he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall ; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." By all of which is meant, as I take it, that Solomon gave utterance to some wise and witty sayings, composed some poetry, and knew something of botany and natural history. We are told also that the fame of his knowledge had spread so far that the Queen of Sheba (in Africa) came with a large retinue to see and consult with him. Then, too, there are accounts given of his magnificent establishment, all tending to show how peaceful a reign he had, for, as we are told, "he had peace on all sides round about him, and Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even unto Beersheba, all the days of Solomon."

I do not suppose you will care to read now about the building of the temple, but if you do you can do so for yourselves in the fifth to the eighth chapters of the first book of Kings, or the third to the seventh chapters of the second book of Chronicles. You will also find there a very fine prayer offered by Solomon on the dedication of the temple. The building, we are told, occupied seven years, and after that Solomon built a palace for himself, which took thirteen years to complete.

But although this great glory was calculated to dazzle the people, and the neighbouring nations, we must not forget that it was mere earthly wealth, and that this is of little worth unless it is used in the service of God and man. Do you recollect what Jesus said to his disciples when he pointed to "the lilies of the field," the work of God,

and said, "that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"? Jesus was trying to teach them that God's care was far greater than man's care, and when we see any man endowed with much wealth, and living in a state of great grandeur, this should not make us envious, unless it be of his power of doing good, nor subservient. Wealth is a trust from God, and he is best entitled to the praise of men who uses it for the benefit of his fellows.

Unfortunately, all this magnificence had a bad effect upon Solomon, and the goodly promises of the early part of his life were not fulfilled in his later days. He, in accordance with the custom of his times, had many wives; one writer tells us that he had a thousand in all, and some of these were not Israelites, and "so it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God," and he "did evil in the sight of the Lord." In consequence of this, it is said, the Lord threatened to sunder his kingdom in twain after his death. There is no doubt that the kingdom of Israel was divided after Solomon's death, and that the kingdom of Judah and that of Israel were set up. But about these two kingdoms you will have to read in some other books, when you grow older. Although Solomon's was a peaceful reign, it seems pretty clear that he ruled the people as a tyrant rules. His son Rehoboam said to the people, "My father did lade you with a heavy yoke," and "my father hath chastised you with whips," both of which expressions show that Solomon's rule was a severe one. His glory and his wealth were dearly purchased if his people were down-trodden or harshly treated. A ruler is truly great whose rule makes his people happy. In the book of Proverbs, which some have said were written by Solomon himself, although possibly he only

gave utterance to a few, or in his reign a compilation was made of that kind of literature, there is one that tells us that "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever;" and another that says, "As a roaring lion, and a raging bear, so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." It would have been well if Solomon had paid heed to these witty and wise sayings; it would be well if all who are in power would lay them to heart.



Last Words.

WITH the death of Solomon, I bring these stories of the "Heroes of Israel" to an end. In the subsequent books of the Old Testament we have accounts of the sayings and doings of the kings of Israel and Judah, the writings of the prophets or great religious teachers, the psalms or religious hymns sung by the Jews in their worship, a collection of pithy sayings or proverbs, and a sort of religious drama called Job. I hope that some day you will read these for yourselves. They are foreign to the purpose of this book. Although the Psalms were written many years ago, they are full of beautiful thoughts about God, which serve to express our ideas about Him even at this time. The wisdom of the Proverbs is applicable at the present day, even while they are full of allusions to customs and events of which we know but little. And some of the sayings of the Prophets have a meaning for us, though many of them seem at first sight rather unintelligible. But learned men have found out that many of the sayings had reference to events in the history of the Jews, and when we come to connect them in this

way, they no longer appear dark and difficult. But as I have said, all these have nothing to do with this book.

What you have read has, I hope, taught you something about the far-off past. You have learned, I trust, that although the writers were, no doubt, mistaken in believing that many of the events they recorded were specially pleasing to God, it was the trust they had in Him which made them exalt the deeds of their heroes. As long as the people worshipped God, so long were they in His favour ; when they ceased to do this, there came disaster and disgrace. Such was the burden of their teaching. And while we have come to believe that God's favour is not dependent upon such acts as these old writers often record, we may feel confident that He is not far from any one of us, and that, "in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." One of the proverbs that I have told you about, says, that "Righteousness exalteth a nation ; but sin is a reproach to any people." That is a lesson the prophets and teachers of old sought to teach ; it is one which is true to-day. Heroism does not simply consist in feats of daring ; it may be shown in little matters, and by persons who do not occupy high places. Every nation has had, and has now, its heroes. It does us all good to know of these men and women. Where they have done wrong, they are examples to shun ; where they have done well they are examples to follow.

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